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THE
SERVICE OF SONG

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IN THE
HOUSE OF THE LORD:

A Sermon,

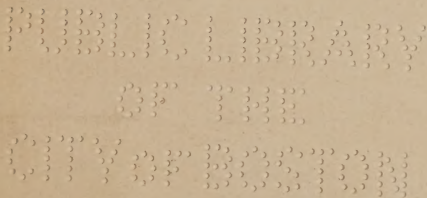
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W. S. Perry

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THE SERVICE OF SONG.

We are apt to forget that the idea of true worship calls for praise as well as prayer. Our approaches to God in His sanctuary, our seasons of communion with Him on our knees in our closets, are not merely for what we can receive in answer to our petitions, but that we may render the praise due unto the Giver of every good and perfect gift. The whole creation praises God after its manner, unconsciously it may be, but yet instinctively and in accordance with the law of its being. The creatures of a day ask nothing at the hand of God, but yet the air is filled with the melody of song; the world abounds in the mute but expressive praises of the animal world. In that noble song, *The Benedicite*, in which all the works of the Lord are called upon by man to bless and praise and magnify the Creator, we recognize the

possibility of this ascription of praise ever going up on high from the creations of the omnipotent hand. The "days and nights," the "dews and frosts," the "fire and hail," the "snows and rains," the "winds and storms," the "sun and moon," the "stars of heaven," the "lightnings and clouds," the waters above, the springs and wells below, the heavens on high, the earth beneath, the light by day, the darkness by night, all in turn speak and sing the praises of God. Angels and men cannot be silent when "all the powers of the Lord," when the "fowls of the air," when "all that move in the sea," when "all things that have breath," "join in creation's hymn" of "alleluia to the Lord." Shall man alone be silent in this universal chant of praise? Is it enough for us, intent alone upon ourselves, our needs, our individual concerns, our sorrows, our sins, our own soul's salvation, never to lift our thoughts above the cry for mercies and gifts, and thus forget to render praise to God for all His benefits?—all unmindful of

"The choirs on high
Hymning in God's blissful mansion
Day and night incessantly."

It is well for us to remember that God's house—the place where His honor dwelleth—is not only a "house of prayer," but that it is a shrine where we are to render unto Him "the honor due unto His name; where we are to worship Him "in the beauty of holiness." The earthly sanctuary is a place where we "with angels and arch-angels and all the company of heaven" are to join in the "Holy, holy, holy Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come," sung by the "angels and living saints and dead," who "one communion make."

Glimpses are given us in the Apocalypse of the ritual of heavenly worship, where "they rest not day and night" in their ceaseless ascriptions of praise. Christ, the Incarnate Son of God, is the center of this heavenly worship, as He is of ours on earth; and the song of cherubim and seraphim, and of the "thousand thousands" who minister unto our God, the song is, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts." The

grandeur uplifting the soul on high. It is to the Geneva reformers that we owe the substitution of the bare, tasteless, repulsive-looking "meeting-house" for the stately and ornamented fane that was of old "the house beautiful of God." To them it is that we owe the use of these very Psalms of David, rendered into wretched doggerel and "tagged with rhyme," as sung to set and formal tunes, as a substitute for the simple, flowing chant that brought to us echoes of the glorious temple service of old.

Another day has happily dawned. We again lose sight of self in our approach to God, and mingle with our prayers the praise due to the great and glorious King of Heaven. We find in music the means for the soul's uplifting. That which attests our highest joy, that which fills and satisfies and sublimates our truest culture and our most perfect art, is made use of in our approach to God in His sanctuary, and bears up our souls to the Source of all good—the infinitely beautiful and true!

God in like beauty of holiness? What provision have we for this majesty of worship, of which we have the type in that glorious ceremonial of old rendered in Israel's temple-court, and of which the pattern is given us in the glimpses S. John gives us of the ritual in the very presence of our God in heaven? We turn instinctively to the Psalms of David, well styled the "Liturgy of the Holy Ghost," used under both dispensations—equally adapted to the temple of Israel or the Christian Church. Well has it been said of these inspired productions, which with their associations and their teachings fill some imperious want in the heart of man, as well as give the very form in which that want would find fit expression when in the presence of God:

"The Psalms are not only the perpetual song of the organized and mythical Body of Christ, but they are the most vital and practical of all the visible bonds which join together the Old Covenant and the New. Apart from this inestimable historical value, they constitute, perhaps, next to Christ and the Creeds, the strongest tie between

the great branches of the Divine Kingdom now worshipping on the earth." *

To these words we may add the magnificent eulogium of the judicious Hooker, that master of English style and ecclesiastical argument :

"What is there necessary for man to know which the Psalms are not able to teach? They are to beginners an easy and familiar introduction, a mighty augmentation of all virtue and knowledge in such as are entered before, a strong confirmation to the most perfect among others. Heroical magnanimity, exquisite justice, grave moderation, exact wisdom, repentance unfeigned, unwearied patience, the mysteries of God, the sufferings of Christ, the terrors of wrath, the comforts of grace, the works of Providence over this world, and the promised joys of that world which is to come, all good heavenly things to be either known, or done, or had, this one celestial fountain yieldeth. Let there be any grief or sickness named for which there is not in this treasure-house a present comfortable remedy at all times ready to be found. Hereof it is that we covet to make the Psalms especially

*Huntington and Metcalf's Treasury of the Psalter, p. 3.

familiar unto all. This is the very cause why we iterate the Psalms oftener than any other part of Scripture besides; the cause wherefore we inure the people, together with their minister, and not the minister alone, to read them as other parts of Scripture."*

As such has the Church of Christ received these words, and sought in Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs "to render unto God" acceptable worship. Some of those old chants, whose melody floated through the courts of God's ancient temples, on the air made heavy with incense and the smoke of sacrifices, have come down to us, and man has found that the means of fitting and majestic worship of old are suited to our needs to-day. And yet, the old writers give a further reason for the use of the responsive service of song in the House of the Lord. Socrates, the Church historian, who wrote early in the fifth century, thus gives the origin of the custom in the Church of singing responsive or antiphonal hymns:

*Hooker: Ecclesiastical Polity, Book V., xxxvii., 2; Keble's edition, ii., p. 159.

"Ignatius, third Bishop of Antioch, in Syria, from the Apostle Peter, who also had conversed familiarly with the Apostles themselves, saw a vision of Angels hymning in alternate chants the Holy Trinity, after which he introduced the mode of singing into the Antiochean Church, whence it was transmitted to all the other churches."

Such is the account we have received in relation to these responsive hymns.

The Puritans, against whose bitter opposition to the Church and her usages Hooker wrote his masterly work, "The Ecclesiastical Polity," faulted the antiphonal singing of the Psalms as depending on the devil for its authority,* and were wont to complain that "They toss the Psalmes in most places like Tennice Balles." But the same iconoclastic temper condemned the organ and the fair fabric for those stately faues which, even in their dilapidation, are the shrines whither pilgrimages are made, and before which the lovers of the beautiful stand and worship a grace and a

* Hooker, Keble's edition, II., 163.

"new song" of our redemption echoes through the heavenly courts, for we read in that wondrous pen-picturing of heaven given us by S. John the Divine, that "they sang a new song, saying, Thou art worthy, . . . for thou wast slain and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood, out of every kindred and tongue and people and nation, and hast made us unto our God, kings and priests." And then there comes from myriad voices the response, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain," while all creation echoes with consenting chorus, "Blessing and honor and glory and power be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb forever." Thus in a mighty burst of melody the redeemed enter into and unite in the heavenly worship. Shall not we on earth join in this liturgy of the heavenly home and "laud and magnify" this "glorious name, evermore praising God and saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Hosts, heaven and earth are full of Thy glory: glory be to Thee, O Lord Most High. Amen."

How may we rightly worship our

It was a note of the early Church and primitive Christians, as viewed by a pagan writer, that they sang hymns to Christ as God in turn, or responsively; and we have cited the tradition of S. Ignatius, who sought to copy on earth the antiphonal music of the choirs above. Thus introduced in the East, the daily use of the Psalter became a principle of the worship of the universal Church, and, with the addition of antiphons, invitatories, canticles, and anthems, made the service of the Church one of song and praise. In the Greek ritual the Psalms were divided into twenty portions, called *cathismata*, or sessions, of which the 119th Psalm was one. Each *cathismata* was divided into three parts by the interposition of the doxology, or Gloria Patri. These divisions were called *staseis*, or stations, and between each station a lesson was interposed. This arrangement of the service resembled the nocturns of the Western ritual.

In the Western Church the whole Psalter was recited each week, and by

an ingenious arrangement there was secured an affecting allocation of certain appropriate Psalms to the early praises of the morn at lauds and to the closing devotions of the evening at compline, while the daily use of the 119th Psalm gave to the intermediate hours a key-note of contemplative piety.

But, beautiful as all this was in theory, it was found impracticable in use, and at the Reformation these holy songs were arranged for monthly use, a portion being assigned to the matins and evensong of each day; thus, in the daily prayers, with their canticles, versicles, and anthems, together with their portion of Psalms, bringing before all who frequent the sanctuary the whole service of song in the house of the Lord month by month throughout the ritual year.

Introduced from the East into the Church at Milan by S. Ambrose, in the fourth century, the antiphonal chant became popular, and its use spread on every side. In the seventh century S. Gregory, Bishop of Rome, re-

nowned for his readjustment of the older liturgies and his preparation of a sacramentary to which much of our service of to-day can be traced, became the author of signal improvements in the music of the Church. The ancient antiphonal chant of Antioch, derived from S. Ignatius, was, as we know from what remains of the Greek melodies, a modification of the musical system which obtained in classic Greece. The chants, and the other music of the Church based thereon, consisted of four tones, as they were styled; *i. e.*, four modes or scales, somewhat similar to our modern keys—the scale of the first reading from D, that of the second from E, that of the third from F, and that of the fourth from G—each an octave above the other, but each of these was necessarily imperfect, as the natural scale alone was then in use.

To each of these tones a chant was associated, and from these chants all of the hymns and anthems used in the Church were derived. Gregory, well-named the Great, enlarged and im-

proved upon this system by adding four other tones, whence arose the eight tones of the Western Church commonly known as the "Gregorian Chants," to which, in later times, another tone, called *irregular*, was added, which is but rarely used. The original tones are known as the "authentic;" those added by Gregory are called the "plagal" tones. The authentic are the 1st, 3d, 5th, and 7th; the plagal are the 2d, 4th, 6th, and 8th.

In the ancient breviaries and missals the Gregorian tones alone are used. In the English and American communions other and more elaborate arrangements of a churchly nature have been adopted, until a style of music has grown up of great beauty and wonderful harmony, known as the Anglican type of sacred song. As the laws of harmony were unknown to the Greeks, and were not discovered till ages after the time of Gregory the Great, the range of the Gregorian tones was necessarily limited, and it was reserved to later ages to add to

what was secured of old a variety and an excellence of melody unattainable in the time of Ignatius, Ambrose, or Gregory. Still, the English Church invented no new method, but confined the results obtained from the newly-discovered resources of harmony and melody within the ancient channels. In fact, she not only added to the ancient music of the Church masterly adaptations and compositions prepared in strict accordance with the established principles of ecclesiastical music, but she also retained and improved the old, till a result was secured which leaves little to be hoped for in future to realize a perfect harmony in the earthly worship of God.

There is reason to believe* that the musical rendering of the services known as intonation—a monotone with melodic endings, called the *accentus ecclesiasticus*, or *modus choraliter legendi*—formed the main feature of the Ambrosian music, and as such was retained by Gregory for the collects

* *Vide* Smith and Cheetham's Dictionary of Christian Antiquities, I., article "Ambrosian Music."

and responses; while he added or adapted, or possibly developed, a more elaborate style of melody for the canticles and Psalms. That there was, besides the simple intoning of the service, a rhythm or melody in the Ambrosian music, is proved by the impression made upon S. Augustine, who often participated in this service of song as introduced by S. Ambrose. "How did I weep," writes Augustine in his "Confessions," "in Thy hymns and canticles, touched to the quick by the voices of Thy sweet attuned Church. The voices flowed into mine ears, and the truth distilled into my heart, whence the affections of my devotions overflowed, and tears ran down, and happy was I therein." To produce such fervor and feeling, these hymns and canticles must have been rendered in melody, and the voices attuned to a sweeter and more rhythmic strain than the mere "musical speech," or intoning of the service, could produce. We have, therefore, both in the solemn monotones in which the cathedral service is rendered, as well

as in the more musical canticles, anthems, and chants heard day by day for centuries in those old fanes whence we derive our historic continuity as a Church, our spiritual lineage as Christians, the service of song in the house of the Lord as it has come down to us from the earliest days.

Jebb, in his interesting and valuable work on "The Choral Service of the United Church of England and Ireland," calls attention to "three modes of celebrating the services of the Church of England, each sanctioned by authority and prescription." The first of these is that known as the parochial, with its few and simple accessories of divine service, its single clergyman, and its adoption of the alternative permitted by the rubrics of the English service-book, "of reciting all parts of the liturgy in the speaking tone of the voice, unaccompanied by music. The small portions of singing customarily introduced have indeed the tacit license of the Church, and the express sanction of individual ordinaries, but are justified by no rubrical

direction. According to this mode, no chant, or canticle, or anthem, properly so called, is employed; but metrical 'versions' of the Psalms, as they are termed, are sung at certain intervals between, not during, the various offices."

"This mode," continues Jebb, "though now by far the most usual in parish churches, is not ancient. The use of metrical Psalms in churches dates no higher than the reign of Elizabeth, and was a custom of foreign growth, then introduced by those Protestants who had been exiled in the Low Countries and Geneva during Queen Mary's time. The compilation of the metrical Psalms, by Sternhold and Hopkins, was not originally intended for use during church service, as their very title shows.* In ancient times, before the Reformation, as far as can be collected from the very vague documents of local history, that mode

* They were "set forth and allowed to be sung in all churches both before and after Morning and Evening Prayer," just as choirs often practice anthems as a religious pastime after the service is over, "and also before and after sermon," the sermon being often preached at a separate hour from the liturgy. *Vide Jebb, in loco.*

of service called choral was adopted very generally in parish churches." *

A second mode of the performance of divine service was a partial adoption of the cathedral mode, though in few cases where this eclectic method obtained were the essential features of the cathedral service—the chanting of prayers, responses, litanies, and creeds—preserved.

"The highest, most perfect, and most ancient mode," says Jebb, "is that which is properly called choral or cathedral service. . . . It is called cathedral because it is the genuine characteristic of the mother Church in each diocese to which the principal clergy are attached, and where the Bishop has his cathedral or throne (and hence the designation), and which ought, therefore, to be pre-eminent in affording to God every circumstantial heightening of external homage. And as these churches excel, for the most part, in a more sub-

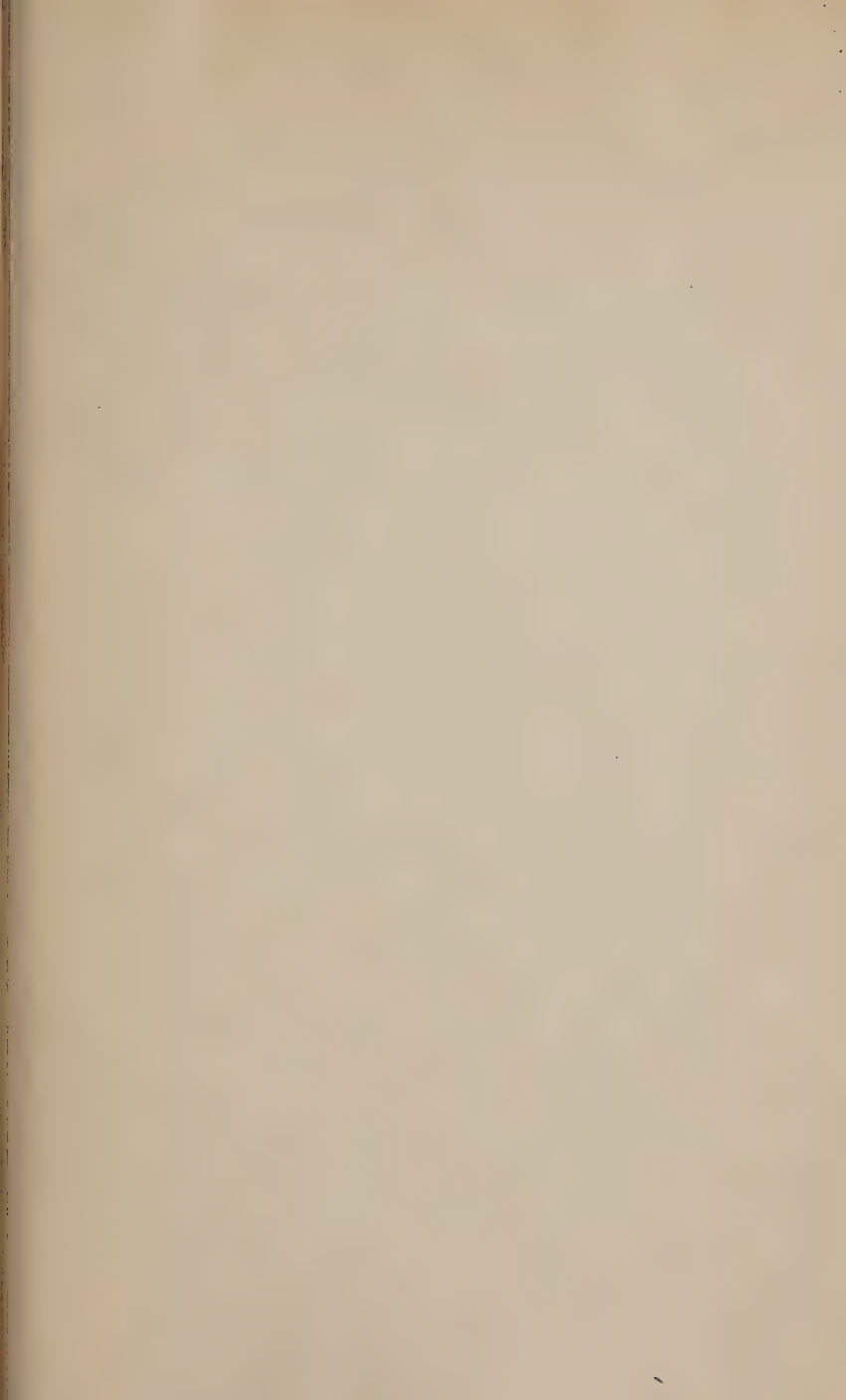
* Bishop Burnet, in his "History of the Reformation," informs us that "till 1549, parish churches had used the plain chant, as well as cathedrals."

lime architecture, in richness of outward decoration, and in a numerous attendance of ministers, so are they also designed to excel in a greater frequency of religious offices, performed with the fullest accompaniment where-with the most devout and expressive music can clothe the lauds, and litanies, and eucharistic services of the Church militant."

It is in view of these requirements for song and service that in each cathedral the voice of praise and prayer is heard, like the gifts bestowed by God, which call forth our adoring gratitude and love, fresh at each return of morn and new at every eventide. These noble structures of the motherland, in which the human voice, unless in musical intonation, could not be heard, and where the performance of the fashionable quartette would lose its effect as if it were rendered out-of-doors, the choral song, the chanted Psalms, the intoned prayers, bear on high the praises of multitudes.

Certainly in some such manner as this the worship of Heaven must be

rendered. Here on earth the ambitious efforts of the quartette and the selections from the opera may be preferred, but such melodies enter not within the gates of bliss. There the singing is with one consenting voice. There the "Holy, holy, holy," comes from the whole body of the redeemed.



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